

I'm Just Trying to be Better by Aladin_Sane

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Summary:

Billy was prepared for any number of things at this gritty metalhead party. But Steve Harrington needing his help was not one of them.

1. Chapter 1

Billy was about to ring the doorbell before he caught himself. What kind of bullshit was that? Who rang the bell at a party like this? He opted to beat the door twice with the side of his fist before letting himself in.

The concert, which had ended less than an hour ago, had left him feeling good. His skin tingled all over with adrenaline, the sweat on the back of his neck was cooling in the Indiana winter air. The band, some underground punks who were just passing through, inviting him over was just the icing on the cake. He couldn't care less how they'd managed to hole up in somebody's actual house. He just wanted to get fucked up.

Before he'd even made it past the entryway, the band's guitarist was thumping down the stairs towards him. The guy had a half crazed smile on his face and a beer in each hand. Billy was surprised to find the house practically empty, but chose not to say anything just yet.

"Billy, right?" The guitarist slung his arm around Billy's shoulders. He was already drunk. "Man, you came just in time. C'mon, party's upstairs."

As they approached the master bedroom, the sound of shrill laughter pierced Billy's ears. The door opened. A few people were scattered around the room, all of them with their eyes focused on the bed.

It was there that the drummer of the band was struggling with some guy. He had him pinned to the bed, practically forcing his tongue down his throat. The guy was struggling, but weakly. His legs kicked uselessly, sneakers getting tangled in the quilt. They looked oddly familiar to Billy but he couldn't determine where from.

"What is this queer shit?" he snapped, shaking his head slightly.

"Nah, man, relax," the guitarist slurred. "It ain't about that, gender's got nothing to do it. It's all about purity."

Billy looked at him, his stomach lurching when he saw the guy's

wrists get tied up with a belt. “Purity?”

“Yeah. We, uh, we found this kid hanging around outside the liquor store. He asked us to buy him something hard, said he had a shit day, and he gave us way too much money. We brought him back here, got him too drunk to think-”

“But why?” Billy didn’t really want to know, but talking about it was easier than watching it. His fists were clenched in the pockets of his leather jackets. He wondered if, had they known he was still a high schooler, that would be him on the bed.

“Look at him. Rich, pretty, he’s probably dripping with bitches. This? This’ll ruin him, and he won’t even be able to tell anyone why.” The guitarist’s smile was fully crazed now. Billy’s skin itched, not in the “I wanna get high” way, but in the “I need to get out of here” way.

“Wait, just hold on a minute-” The voice dragged Billy’s focus back to the bed. His blood ran cold when he recognized that face. “Can we just, can we back up a minute here? I need, I need, I’m too drunk for this,” Steve Harrington slurred uselessly.

King Steve, Hawkins’ golden boy, about to have his life ruined right in front of Billy’s eyes. He should’ve been grateful, should’ve been thrilled. Fuck, why couldn’t he just enjoy this perfect revenge that just dropped into his lap?

The drummer undid Steve’s belt and he tried to sit up. “Now, hold on, buddy. Can we just, can we- OW! Stop that!”

His hands pushed back against the drummer as a bloody hick was created on the crook of his neck. “I need a glass of water. Please. I just need some water.” Steve’s head fell to the side and he blinked twice. Confusion spread over his face like dropping food coloring into water. “Billy?”

What eyes weren’t enraptured with the scene before them landed on Billy himself. Steve held his gaze, both too stunned to look away.

“You know this kid?” the guitarist asked.

“Yeah. I live in town here.” Billy’s mind raced, he had to think fast.

He had to get out of there. “Let me do it. We’ve got beef, and nobody’ll believe I’m a fag if he runs to the cops.”

The drummer got off of him. Steve saw his opportunity and took it. But his mad dash for the door ended with him faceplanting less than a foot from the bed. His face crumpled as Billy hauled him back onto the mattress.

“C’mon, man, please. I know you hate me. Please, Billy. Don’t do this, man.”

“Shut up,” Billy hissed. He positioned himself carefully over Steve before glancing at the rest of the party. “Get out, this isn’t a performance.”

“Why would we leave when you’re getting to the good part?” the drummer demanded. His anger seemed to rattle the walls, Steve whimpered.

“Trust me. He’ll just be in shock for a bit, it’ll be boring. He’ll be fun to watch when I’m done with him.” Billy held his breath as he waited. It wasn’t until everyone was gone and the door was shut that he let it out.

“Hargrove, list- listen to me, okay?”

“Shut up.” Billy got up and moved to press his ear against the door.

“Please, I’ll do whatever you want. Just not this, man, okay? Not this?”

“Shh!” Opening the door slowly, he looked up and down the empty hallway. He shut it again and locked it. “Alright, Harrington. Can you be quiet for me?”

Without waiting for an answer, Billy lifted Steve to his feet and half dragged half carried him towards the window. Steve was lighter than he’d expected, but still felt like dead weight. His whole body was like jello, slipping out of Billy’s hands.

“I’m, dude, I’m seriously about to puke.”

“If you throw up on me, I’ll kill you. Swear to God.”

“You sure know how to sweeten a deal.”

“Be quiet. Okay, just, hold on, alright?”

He threw Steve over his back in the worst piggyback he’s ever given and opened the window. Steve’s fingers were curled tightly in his shirt, blunt nails scratching at his shoulders. He reached one hand back and held Steve as best he could as he carefully climbed out the window.

It was slow, tedious work. Each step was almost a disaster. As soon as his feet hit the ground, Billy wanted to scream with joy. He took off in a brisk jog across the lawn towards his car. Steve pooled sloppily into the passenger seat. Billy started the car.

“Are your parents home?”

He didn’t get an answer. Scowling, he reached over and flicked Steve’s forehead.

“Hey! King Steve! Are your parents home?”

“Jesus, no. They won’t be back until, uh, what day is it? They come home wednesday. Is it wednesday?”

“Relax, it’s friday night. Okay. Where do you live?” Billy decided not to think too hard about why he was doing this. All he knew was that he wouldn’t be able to get that terrified look on Steve’s face out of his head for awhile.

God, this was a shitty party.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments are much loved, tell me what you want to see more of. I have no idea where to go from here, tbh.

Neither of them spoke as Steve fumbled with the lock. After a few moments, Billy just snatched the keys from his hands and let them in himself. It was too cold to deal with this shit.

Steve was still wobbly on his feet as he stepped inside. He stood there, staring blankly ahead as Billy locked the door behind them and turned on the lights.

“How do you feel?”

“I need to brush my teeth,” Steve said.

Understandable. Billy helped him slowly up the stairs. They took frequent breaks so Steve could stop the world from spinning. The bathroom door was already open. Billy propped Steve up against the counter.

“There’s uh, there’s something on my bed. Across the hall. Bring it to me?”

“At least tell me what it is.”

“You’ll know.”

“Harrington, I swear to God-” But Steve was too busy throwing up in the shower to answer. “Fine.”

He barged into the bedroom. Everything was perfectly in place, the bed was already made. As if Billy needed more proof that Steve was too perfect for his own good. His closet was probably color coordinated.

His eyes landed on the bed. Propped against the pillows was a

wooden baseball bat that had been riddled with nails. Billy blinked. What the fuck?

He grabbed it and went back to the bathroom. “Hey, Harrington? Uh, what the actual fuck?”

Steve made grabby hands until Billy handed it over. His knuckles tightened around it, but he left it hanging by his side. Billy watched him struggle with the toothbrush for a solid minute. It wasn’t until he rubbed toothpaste over his cheek, completely missing his mouth, that Billy stepped in.

“Alright, give me that.” He wrenched the toothbrush from his hand. With his free arm, he hoisted Steve up to sit on the counter. Amidst drunken protests, he firmly held Steve’s jaw and started scrubbing at his teeth.

He was only doing it because he wanted to hurry this up and go home. That was it. Not because he felt physical pain in his chest at watching Steve struggle so pathetically. He pulled out the toothbrush.

“Spit.” Steve looked confused for a moment. Billy clapped his hand over his mouth. “In the sink, fuckface.”

Oh. Steve did as he was told before turning back to Billy. “Keep brushing.”

Billy knew what was happening. He knew that Steve just wanted the feel of some asshole’s spit off his lips, wanted to brush the memory away completely. If he could’ve, he probably would’ve brushed his own gums raw.

“No.” Billy pulled him off the counter.

“Hargrove, you, you piece of shit.” There was no fire behind it. Steve was slumped against Billy’s chest, his body shuddering slightly.

“Why do you have a bat full of nails?”

“Just in case.”

“In case of what?”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.” Steve gave a full body shudder and swayed dangerously.

“Alright, bedtime.”

Wrangling Steve into his own bedroom was harder than it needed to be. After setting Steve on the bed, Billy began digging through drawers to find pajamas.

“Leave it. I don’t, I don’t wanna change.” Steve sounded surprisingly sober. Billy turned to look, just in time to watch him fall right off the bed.

“Trust me, you don’t want to wake up in these clothes.”

“You know what?” Steve pointed a finger in Billy’s general direction, only off by a good foot.

“What?”

“You’re a fucking, you’re an asshole! I want you out of my house! Don’t, don’t ever talk to me! Okay? Just, fucking, get outta here!” He sunk more to his side as he spoke. By the end of his speech, Steve was laying on his side, curled around his bat.

Billy’s jaw clenched. “Yeah? You prefer I left you there? Want me to drive you back? Prove what an asshole I am?” He bent down over Steve, intent on getting in his face to yell some more. It was hard to see, but in the dim moonlight he could make out tear streaks running down Steve’s face.

“Fuck you.” It was whispered and hollow. Steve sounded like he was dying. Maybe he was.

“Let’s just take a breather, alright? Let’s get you in bed, at least. Sound good?” Billy waited until Steve nodded, his hair ruffling against the carpet, before lifting him.

He tried to be careful, but drunk Steve was a pain in the ass. His grip slipped and he ended up just dropping Steve on the mattress. After dropping pushing both of his legs into place, Billy realized that he was fucking tired too.

“Put on a record?” Steve asked softly.

Billy dug around the stack of them and scoffed. “Olivia Newton John? What’s wrong with you?”

Instead of answering, Steve just started singing the first track off the album. His voice wavered, overshot some notes, died too quickly for others. Whatever. Billy put the album on and turned the volume down low before dropping into bed beside Steve.

Steve’s heart raced. He felt like throwing up again. It was stupid of him, thinking Billy Hargrove had done any of this for him. He set his bat carefully on the floor before turning to face Billy. Might as well get it over with.

His hand ghosted over Billy’s chest before landing, scared but firm, over his crotch. Billy’s hand wrapped around his wrist and yanked it away.

“Harrington-”

“It’s okay. I owe you. Take what you want.” Steve spoke as if he were offering Billy an old t shirt.

“No. I don’t want that, don’t be stupid.”

Steve’s face twisted like he was going to cry. “I don’t get it. Why’d you bring me back here? Didn’t you just want me for yourself?”

“Jesus Christ. No. I’m not a...” Billy squeezed his eyes shut. “Would you get a girl out of that situation?”

“Absolutely.”

“Would you expect her to give you any favors in return?”

“No.”

“Then that’s why.”

Steve shook his head. “But I’m not a girl. And you hate me.”

“You’re pretty like a girl.”

Billy didn’t know why he said it, but he hated it the second it hit the air. Part of him wanted to kill Steve for hearing it. But no response ever came. His slip up was ignored. Billy wasn’t sure if he was grateful or not.

“Steve. Why do you have that bat?” Billy asked again.

“Have you ever played DnD?”

“No.”

“It’s more fun than you’d think. Honest.”

“Steve. Answer the question.”

“Dude, this is gonna sound crazy.” Steve looked up at him, eyes sincere and wide in the moonlight. “But I’ve seen the dogs that guard the gates of Hell. I’ve fought the devil. And if I talk about it, Reagan is gonna kill me.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

But Steve was already asleep, head pressed into Billy’s chest and one hand loosely gripping the handle of a baseball bat. Billy sighed and ran a hand through his messy hair. Why was he the one dealing with a shitfaced lunatic on a friday night?

3. Chapter 3

Billy woke up in the middle of the night. The music playing wasn't his, the bed wasn't his. He looked around carefully to figure out his surroundings. There was a figure sitting in the window, a baseball bat swinging lightly by its side.

"Steve?" His eyes focused on the way the nails in the bat glittered. Steve's face was outlined by the moonlight. Billy might've called him beautiful, despite the haunted look in his eyes.

"You don't call me that."

"It's your name."

"You've never called me Steve before tonight. It's always King Steve or Harrington."

"What's the matter? Miss your title?"

Steve did, but he wouldn't say it. He missed being King Steve. Excited, out of control, young, and so so stupid. He wanted that back so badly he could feel it tugging in his bones. Sometimes he didn't know if he was heartbroken about Nancy leaving him or about knowing he could never be normal again.

"Come back to bed." Billy hated that he sounded like a tired housewife, but it was 3am and he wanted to sleep. Steve didn't move. "Harrington, you need to sleep."

"Are you going to kill me?"

Steve looked over at Billy, real fear on his face. Billy was more surprised than he had any right to be. "You're so drunk," he said.

"Will you take me outside if you do? My mom'll, Jesus, if anything gets stained she'll flip. She'll fucking, my mom'll have a cow if I leave a mess."

"That's what you're worried about?" Billy studied him to see if he was kidding. But his face never wavered. "You're fucked up."

“Fucked up like drunk, or in the head?”

“I can’t tell.”

Steve turned his attention back out the window. After a moment, Billy got up and moved to stand behind him. He was just watching the swimming pool, his eyes burning with intensity. It was like he was looking for something, waiting for something.

“You a swimmer?” Billy asked, just to break the silence.

“Not anymore.”

“I’m sick of this cryptic bullshit, Harrington. First all that shit about the devil, now you’re being fucking weird about a pool. I’m doing you a favor, you could act like it.”

Steve snapped his head back, his eyes blazing. “I offered to suck your dick, what more do you want from me?”

“Some fucking answers.”

“Fuck you.”

Billy grabbed his shoulders and shoved him back against the wall. His head snapped back hard, but he didn’t react. His body stayed relaxed and flexible.

“Why were you at that party?”

“Why are you such an asshole?”

“Why were you buying so much alcohol? You don’t throw parties anymore.”

“Why were you buying so much alcohol?” Steve was smiling, lopsided and dopey.

“I’m seriously about to beat the shit out of you.”

“Oh no. Again?” He laughed hard, as if he’d just told the funniest joke in the world.

Billy snapped. His fist hit Steve's face before he could decide it was a bad idea. The shrill laughter stopped immediately. Slowly, Steve raised his head to stare into Billy's eyes.

"You're stupid."

That... that was it? After all the shit Billy put him through, after all the shit he'd been through just that night? King Steve was either too dumb for his own good, or he'd really dealt with some fucked up shit.

"What was all that shit about the devil?" Billy asked.

"You're stupid and I, I..." Steve squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head. Every thought felt like it was pushing through a brick wall. "Fuck, I love this song."

"Focus, Harrington."

"No, you focus, Harrington! Max is, God, Max is a good kid." Steve gripped Billy's shirt collar and looked at him with complete desperation. "She's such a good kid and you're so mean to her. Why? She hasn't... She's the zoomer, dude."

"That's a private affair, family only."

"It's not her fault you moved here. And it's, it's for sure not her fault your dad's such a prick."

Billy's blood ran cold. He wanted to throw Steve out the window, he wanted to drive him back to that fucking house and throw him at those assholes' feet.

"What the fuck did you say about my dad? Do you want me to kill you?" He shook Steve again, who just clung tightly to his shirt.

"I just, I didn't, I don't know shit dude. Max just said that, fuck, I just heard that he yells a lot and that just, it isn't cool. Ya know, man? My dad yells a lot too. It just isn't cool."

Billy shook his head, snarling in Steve's face. "Oh, Daddy yells a lot, does he? Well that just fucking bites, doesn't it, Harrington?"

Steve was nodding, eyes unfocused and hair flopping. “Yeah, it does. It fucking-”

“Well, poor fucking Steve!”

“I wish your dad didn’t yell at you.”

That gave Billy pause. His anger went on hold for a moment, replaced by shock. “Huh?”

“Yeah. Like, maybe if he was cool you wouldn’t be such a dick? Because I bet you’re cool, under all that bullshit.” Steve cringed, laughed breathlessly. “Bullshit. It’s all bull~shit. Right, Billy?”

“You’re a sloppy fucking drunk.”

“Bullshit. That’s what she called us. Nancy said we were bullshit. I wanted to marry her. Does that sound gay?”

“Why would you wanting to marry a girl be gay?”

“And she just called it bullshit and now she’s with Jonathan and he’s better for her. He makes her happy, and I’m just bullshit. Bullshit King Steve who got Barbara killed.”

Billy cocked an eyebrow. Steve’s whirlwind was hard to keep up with, his emotions were a mess. He was shuddering again, his face pale and sweat rolling from his hairline.

“Who’s Barbara?” he asked, voice soft. Steve just shook his head and let out what was either a dry sob or a dry heave. Billy pulled him in tight, one hand cradling the back of his head. “Alright, just forget it. You love this song. Right? Think about the song.”

He rocked Steve gently to the music. His eyes focused on the pool outside, wondering what was wrong with it. This was well outside of his comfort zone. Steve was right about one thing. It was all bullshit.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

Honestly not super sure where this is going, so feel free to leave any requests or ideas you have.

Thanks for all the support!

Billy woke up, to an empty bed again. He was almost pissed when he realized that it was almost 10am. Getting made at Steve for being awake during daylight wasn't as justified.

He made his way down to the kitchen, where he could hear dishes clattering and soft curses. Steve, wrapped up in a thick green robe, was holding the edge of the counter. His eyes were squeezed shut and his breathing was ragged. In front of him was a bowl, a carton of milk, and spilled lucky charms.

“Sit down, I’ll do it,” Billy said. He shoved Steve towards the kitchen table and didn’t even feel bad when he almost fell over. Good. Whatever happened last night did not need to keep happening.

“Wait, gimme the...” Steve snapped his fingers urgently. Billy tried to hand him the box of cereal but just got it slapped out of his hands. Oh, he was gonna murder Steve when things went back to normal. “The BOWL. Gimme.”

Billy handed over the bowl, which Steve promptly threw up into before tossing it onto the table. He dropped himself into a chair, pillowied his face in his arms and let out a deep groan.

“I’m hungover,” he announced.

“I noticed.” Billy grabbed another bowl and filled this one with cereal and milk. “How much of last night do you remember?” He set the bowl on the table and hit the back of Steve’s head with a spoon.

“All of it.” He scoffed and sat up, taking the spoon. “That’s the fucked up part. I blacked out the night we played strip poker with the sorority girls from Alpha Mega Whatever, but I have perfect

recollection of that hell night.” He shook his head and grabbed a bowl.

“That happens with trauma, it’s called flashbulb memory.” Billy switched out the bowls in Steve’s hands, pushed the inedible one further away. “Or whatever.”

“I bet you’re like, a secret genius or whatever,” Steve said around a mouthful of marshmallows.

“I’m not.” His nose wrinkled in disgust as milk dripped down Steve’s chin. “God, it’s easy to be on top in a small town, isn’t it?”

“I still had to go one on one with Peter Raymond for that title. I’m charming and I had the best right hook in the county.”

“Yeah?” Billy leaned in closer. Steve didn’t lean back. He wasn’t sure if he liked that or not. “Where was that right hook last night?”

With a deadpan look on his face, Steve spit his mouthful of half chewed cereal into Billy’s face. “Jonathan Byers took that title last year,” he said as Billy slowly wiped his face with his hand.

He shook the milk off his fingers and then lunged. Steve didn’t fight back. He just kept that same blank look on his face as Billy pinned him to the floor by his neck. That caught Billy off guard. He straddled Steve’s waist, panting heavily with anger.

“Do it,” Steve said.

“You’re fucked up.”

“You want to kill me. Do it.”

“I don’t, Jesus, Harrington.” Billy got off of him, titled him back up right by grabbing his chair. “I don’t want to kill you.”

“You sure act like you do.” Steve’s voice was raspy. He rubbed at his neck. “Gimme the other bowl.”

Billy slid it down the table towards him and looked away. He turned back in time to watch Steve wipe his mouth. His hair was a mess, and

Billy reached out to smooth it away from his sweaty face.

He paused, hand suspended in the air. Steve was staring confusedly at the tips of his fingers. Billy slapped him lightly in an attempt to rectify the situation. It didn't work.

"Yeah?" Steve asked.

"Fuck off."

"You want some cereal?" Steve stood wobbly to grab another bowl, but Billy just shoved him back into his chair.

"I don't eat breakfast. And you shouldn't move too much."

A moment passed. Billy twiddled his thumbs as he gathered his nerve.

"So what do you want to do about... last night?" he asked, voice soft.

Steve laughed. Billy was caught off guard, almost considered slapping him for real.

"It's not a joke, Harrington."

"It might as well be." Steve stood. "There's nothing to be done," he said decidedly before taking his bowl to the sink.

"You could report it. Your dad's rich, could get you a real nice lawyer." Billy followed him, just to be safe.

"Yeah? You wanna be the one to tell my dad that I let another guy shove his hand down my pants?" Steve hooked his hip onto the counter.

Billy stepped closer, grabbed Steve and lifted him. He placed him on the counter, where he was less of a fall risk than just standing. "It wasn't your fault." It took him a second longer to back away than it should have, but Steve didn't react to any part of the situation.

"Would you tell your dad, if it had been you?"

“That’s different.”

“Why?”

“Harrington.”

“Because you’re stronger than me? Manlier? Because it wouldn’t have happened to you because you would’ve kicked his teeth in?”

“Steve.”

“Because you’re so fucking badass and I’m so fucking weak that I-”

“Because my dad wouldn’t give a shit!” Billy threw the nearest mug to the ground, hoping to scare Steve quiet. He hated this. Being confronted about why he did things, admitting what his life was like.

Steve wasn’t intimidated. “You think mine does?” He spread his hands and laughed. “Where the fuck is he, then?” Turning towards the living room, he started yelling. “Hey, Dad! Guess who got fucking assaulted last night! Three tries!”

“Shut the fuck up, Harrington.” Billy scrubbed at his face with his hands. Steve was a bigger pain in the ass than he had ever imagined. Nothing phased him. Maybe it was all that devil bullshit. “We could do something else. Without getting authorities involved.”

“No offense, but fuck off. I just want to pretend like it never happened.”

“Well, it did and now you’ve got to do something about it.”

“God DAMN. Why does everybody act like that? Why the fuck would I ever want to think about that again? What is it with this ‘dealing with things’ bullshit? I am dealing with it! This is how I deal!” Steve almost fell off the counter, Billy reached out to steady him.

“What’re you on about?” This felt like it was approaching territory that was outside of Billy’s jurisdiction. Billy wanted to deal with last night and nothing else. And for someone who didn’t ‘deal with things’ Steve sure seemed like he wanted to talk about them.

“That was the deal with me and Nancy too. She wanted to ‘deal with things’ and I just wanted to forget. Isn’t it just easier to forget?”

“What sort of things?”

Steve waved a dismissive hand. “Devils. Dogs. Hell. Reagan.”

“You know, that band is in town for the next two days.”

“Oh, yeah? Fucking great, I missed their set last night. So glad to have this opportunity to-”

“Shut up. I mean we could fuck with them. If we go tonight, we can collect evidence of other shit they do. The night after that, get the police involved.”

Steve visibly paled. Billy almost went in for another hug before he remembered that neither of them had the ‘drunk’ excuse anymore.

“You want me to... go back in there?”

Billy put his hand on Steve’s knee. “They’re gonna be pissed anyways. I know guys like that. They’ll come looking, Steve. You won’t be able to ride this one out,” he explained, keeping his voice soft.

Steve looked ready to cry. His body curled in on itself and his shoulders shook. The robe string was tied and untied into a tight knot over and over again. After a minute, he nodded.

“Yeah. Fucking, whatever. Let’s go back. Fuck. I hate you, Hargrove.” His tone was breathless, empty.

“I know, Harrington.”

Silently, he decided that he liked Steve better as a loud asshole.

5. Chapter 5

“This is dumb,” Steve huffed, trying to peek past Billy at the mirror.

“Move and you’ll lose an eye.” Billy grabbed his jaw to hold him in place. “This way you’ll blend in.”

He stuck out his tongue in concentration. Putting eyeliner on himself was so easy, why did Harrington have to make everything so hard? He kept squirming, blinking, moving, ruining the whole thing. With his thumb, Billy expertly smudged the crooked line so it looked purposeful. Steve blinked up at him and Billy felt his gut twist. Those eyelashes went on forever.

“Am I pretty now?” Steve asked teasingly.

“We don’t have the time or funds to make you pretty.”

He tossed some red lipstick at Steve and leaned back against the sink. Harrington stood up from where he’d been sitting on the closed toilet and bent over the counter beside him. Billy watched, maybe too closely, as Steve dragged the makeup across his mouth before rubbing his lips together.

“Would you buy me a drink in a bar?” he asked, turning to face Billy. It was no secret that his Jokes per Minute increased with anxiety, but now his jpm was practically through the roof. He wanted to stop, really. But trying to say anything serious made his throat twist up.

“No.” Billy used his thumb to wipe away a smudge of lipstick at the corner of Steve’s mouth. Fuck. When had he gotten so touchy? When had Steve gotten okay with it?

“Are we ready to rock and roll yet?”

“Don’t say that, it’s lame.”

Steve was wearing the tightest jeans he owned (which were actually pretty damn tight if Billy had anything to say about it) and a black t shirt. It was the best he could do but he still looked so damn good. Like he helped his mom bake cookies and glared at people who

talked too loudly in the library.

Billy shrugged off his denim jacket and shoved it at Steve. “Put this on.” He still looked more like a Grease side character than a metalhead, but whatever. As long as he didn’t look like a golden boy he would be okay.

Steve popped the collar of the denim jacket. Billy tried not to cringe. Maybe Steve was just fucked either way.

“Alright, listen. When we get in there, you’re gonna be good, got it? Don’t drink anything, don’t eat anything. Stick close to me. Got it.”

“Got it, Chief.” Steve gave a little salute and Billy slapped his hand.

“Harrington, I mean it. If you can’t find me, just leave.” His eyes bore into Steve’s slightly nervous ones until he was sure the message had gone through. “Okay. Let’s rock and roll.”

Steve almost fell over his own feet as he scrambled to keep up with Billy’s determined pace. “Oh, so when I say it, it’s lame, but you can say it? That’s seriously fucked-”

“Shut up.” Billy waited patiently for Steve to lock the front door and then double (triple, quadruple) check to make sure.

The car ride was quiet, tense. Steve was practically shaking out of his skin. Billy kept the radio quiet to avoid suspicion. He couldn’t take the quiet anymore.

“What’s going on in that pretty head of yours?” he asked.

Steve looked near tears as the approached the house. He took a deep breath and looked Billy right in the eyes. Billy prepared to hear something heart wrenching and painful.

“Bathtubs are just reverse boats.”

“You’re dumb as fuck, Harrington.”

Billy cut off the engine and they both got out, slamming the doors in sync. Their footsteps lined up as they met at the front of the car and

walked in side by side. Steve's feet slid around in the too big boots he'd swiped from his dad's closet.

"Okay, but that was kinda badass," he whispered to Billy.

"Shut up," Billy snapped. "But, yeah."

Things went well for the first ten minutes. Steve stayed close, practically breathing down Billy's neck. The music was painfully loud, each bass strum rattled the walls. There were more people here tonight, more of what Billy had been expecting the night before. Perfect. He and Steve could just slip in and out, unnoticed.

He lead the way up the stairs and carefully opened the door to the bedroom from before. Peeking inside, he found it empty. Good.

"C'mon," he said, tugging on Steve's shirt.

He found more resistance than he'd expected. A glance over his shoulder showed Steve gripping the door frame, looking deadly pale. He shook his head, messily styled mohawk shaking too.

"I can't go in there."

Billy felt a flare of frustration, but stamped it down. He was trying to be the hero here. Instead, he nodded.

"Wait here."

"What about the rules?"

"Don't fucking move. Got it?" When he got a confirmation nod, he let go of Steve's hair and slipped into the room.

Steve watched the door shut and closed his eyes. He did everything he could remember from his one therapy lesson back in sixth grade. Counted backwards from ten, took deep breaths. When he felt stable, he opened his eyes again.

He almost fell back against the door. The drummer was walking up the stairs towards him. His head was turned back, talking to someone, and he hadn't seen Steve yet.

Fuck the plan.

Steve practically threw himself into the room on the other side of the hall.

The room was packed with people, all of which had pupils almost as big as their whole eyes. Steve tried to stick to the wall, but kept finding himself getting jostled around. Somebody pressed a small square of paper into his hand.

He blinked at the person in confusion. “What is this?” he asked, shouting to be heard over the music.

They leaned in so close their lips brushed against his ear. “It’s just candy. Like a fruit roll up.” The popped the “p” hard and Steve’s whole body shivered in response.

He considered for a moment. This felt stupid, somehow. What were the odds this was just candy? Whatever, he was having a shitty night and needed something to do with his mouth anyways. He’d smoked weed, like, four times. He knew what he was doing.

Billy’s whole body tensed up when he left the bedroom and realized Steve was gone. Oh, this fucking kid. He checked behind the door, just to be sure. But Steve was nowhere to be seen.

If he wasn’t dead, Billy was gonna kill him.

He turned to go further down the hall to look around, but quickly found himself shoved against a wall.

“Billy, right?”

Fuck.

“Get off me, asshole.” He shoved the drummer back and readjusted his shirt.

“Is your golden boy here?” The drummer looked around, an eagerness in his eyes that made Billy wanna cut them out.

“No. I just came for the blow, fuck off.”

“You ruined a party, Billy. You ruined my party. An eye for an eye, or some shit. Right?”

“Or some shit. Alright? That kid is all buddy-buddy with the chief of police, I helped you out.”

“Do you always say you’re helping people when you screw them over?”

Billy watched him run his tongue over his lips. Jesus, is that what that looked like to other people? He took in height, build, debated whether or not a fight would be worth it. This guy had friends. Probably not.

“I gotta take a leak,” he said plainly before shoving past the drummer into the bathroom.

He locked the door behind him and leaned over the sink. Fuck. This was going so poorly. He had to find Steve and get the fuck outta there. Easy. A kid like that would stick out in a place like this.

The challenge was doing it before anyone from last night found him.

Fuck.

Okay. Go time.

He tried to keep his pace steady, and not panicked, as he poked his head into every room he found. No Steve. No Steve. No fucking Steve.

He went downstairs, waded through masses of people. His eyes scoured the crowd. A few faces were familiar, but still no Harrington.

Maybe he’d left already? Billy had told him to go home if they got separated.

He caught a glimpse of a sloppy mohawk through the window to the porch. Billy’s heart jerked. His hands shoved people out of his way as if of their own accord.

On the front step, Steve was swaying slightly, sitting beside some girl who had clearly just come out for a smoke break. He was talking (babbling) and she was just listening in an amused silence.

“... and I’m so sad because I just can’t find him? If I don’t find him before they find me, I’m probably going to die. You know?”

“Uh huh.” She glanced at Billy and rolled her eyes playfully. He breathed a sigh of relief. “Hey, what does your friend look like?”

“Ummm.” Steve’s lower lip stuck out as he thought. “He’s got real pretty eyes, and only does the bottom two buttons of his shirt. Isn’t that dumb? It’s march in Indiana. Oh, and he’s got this ugly fucking mullet.”

“Hey.” Billy tried to hide a grin when Steve practically fell over in surprise. “What happened to our rules?”

“The ones you broke first?”

“Are you...?” Billy crouched down, held Steve’s face in his hands. His pupils were blown. ”Did you take something?”

“Just like, a little paper. No biggie.”

“Holy fuck.” Billy was gonna kill him. “That was fucking acid, you stupid fucking-”

Steve cut him off with a scoff. “That was like, a 6 on the ph scale. Dustin says-”

“No, Steve. The hallucinogen. We’re going home right now.” Billy was furious. At what, he wasn’t sure, but he knew if they didn’t get out of here he’d end up taking it out on Steve. He wasn’t going to let that happen.

“Thanks for babysitting,” he called over his shoulder as he pushed Steve towards his car. This house was in the middle of nowhere, it’d take forever to get home. This was a bad fucking night.

“Oh, good! You found him!”

Both Steve and Billy froze at the sound of that voice.

“Billy?”

God, that whisper was so pitiful. Billy wanted to kill Steve just for being that soft. “It’s okay,” he whispered instead.

He turned around to face the drummer, now flanked three other guys from last night. “You don’t want to do this,” he said.

“That’s all you got?” Steve whispered. Oh, Billy wanted to hit him.

“Hmm. Pretty sure we do. Just give us your boy and maybe we’ll let you off the hook.” Billy knew better than to believe that.

There were four of them, and though Billy and Steve made a good team in basketball, they weren’t that good. And this wasn’t basketball. Besides, Steve looked ready to pass out, either from drugs or sheer terror.

They weren’t gonna make it out of this.

“Steve, run.” Billy was gearing up for a fight, he could feel it settling into his muscles. He held his car keys out towards Steve.

“What?”

“Fucking run! Get Hopper here!”

It didn’t take any more convincing. Steve snatched the keys and took off. One of the four flew off the porch after him.

As soon as he was in reach, Billy started swinging. One hit sent the guy falling back on his ass, but that only felt good for a second. Another guy hit Billy from the side, knocking both of them to the dirt.

He put up a good fucking fight, all things considered. It took two guys to hold him down while the drummer drove the heel of his boot into Billy’s ribcage. He grabbed Billy’s face and jerked it to the side.

“Yikes. This looks even worse,” he sneered.

Billy couldn't see much through the open car door, but he could see Steve's feet kicking and somebody else struggling with him. The boots had fallen off in the run, leaving Harrington with nothing but grass stained white socks. Billy felt like crying.

He must've started too, because the drummer wiped at his cheeks. "Oh, don't worry, sweetheart. We'll let you watch."

Rage filled him. With a howl that barely felt human, Billy jerked up towards him. It was worthless, he still wasn't stronger than three grown men.

"I'll fucking kill you if you touch him." He didn't know when yet, but he knew he would. And he'd hunt them down and do it in the next life too. And the next and the next until Billy was nothing more than a demon chasing them forever.

A strangled cry snapped all their attention back towards the car. Steve had crawled through the car, tumbling out the passenger side door. The man was scrambling away from the other side.

Billy watched the silhouette of Steve heft something in his hands. He wasn't sure if he felt pride or fear when he caught the end of it sparkling in the moonlight. Then Steve was coming towards him and it was just fear.

"Get off of him," Steve said, voice void of all traces of fear.

"Now now," the drummer said, holding his hands up placatingly and stalking towards Steve. "Don't get all worked up now-"

"Steve, don't!" Billy felt like he could read all of Steve's thoughts, and none of them were rational. But it was too late.

The nail riddled bat glittered as Steve swung it up. A wet crunching noise hit the air. The drummer stumbled back, his hands grabbing weakly at Steve's jacket before he crumpled to the ground. The handle of the bat was wrenched out of Steve's hands.

Billy didn't know at what point the men holding him down had left, but he was running as soon as he realized he was free. He barely slowed as he hit Steve, wrapping him in his arms and turning him

quickly. Why he felt the need to shield Steve's eyes was a mystery. He was the one who had cheese grated the guy's face.

It was dark, too dark to see the massacre on the ground in front of them. Billy was grateful.

"What'd you do?" he whispered.

Steve started talking, too fast and all at once as if he thought Billy was walking out the door and he had 30 seconds to make him stay. "He was gonna hurt you. I didn't think I was gonna do it, and then he got close and all I could see was that fucking whatever it was, that fucking demofucking flower with teeth and I just -"

"Shh, shh." He buried a hand in Steve's hair, held him down. Steve was trembling violently, like his soul was fighting to leave his body.

God, Billy did not want to deal with this.

"Nobody will believe we were even here. Okay? Nobody saw shit besides these assholes and they're all high as fuck. Okay?"

He jerked Steve back to look in his eyes. They both nodded at each other, Billy short and determined, Steve sloppy and slow.

"Okay."

"Okay." He tucked some stray hair behind Steve's hair. "Go wait in the car."

Billy waited until Steve had walked a bit away. He moved closer and planted his foot on the drummer's chest.

"You got what you deserved, bitch."

He grabbed the handle of the bat and yanked it free. No murder weapon, no credible witnesses, no evidence. Just some dead asshole laying belly up in the grass.

Notes for the Chapter:

This is honestly not at all where I planned for this

story to go. But what can I say? I'm a sucker for dead rapists.

Anyways! Sorry (?)

Hit me up with any suggestions or comments and I'll see what I can do. I have a more clear picture of where we'll go from here, so probably no more curveballs. We'll see though.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

Not super happy with this one, but we needed a little more exposition and less action, I think.

Also I'm surprised at the response to the previous chapter? I honestly thought about changing the direction of the story, but like. Here we are!

Any comments, questions, or suggestions are welcome and appreciated!

Billy didn't go home that night. He didn't know the etiquette for post murder conversation, but leaving Steve alone in that big empty house felt wrong. They lay, side by side, both staring blankly at the ceiling. The blood had come off Steve's face but the eyeliner was more stubborn.

"My parents don't come home for another week," Steve said.

"Do you even have parents?" Billy asked, half kidding. But it was also kind of a valid question. The closest he'd come to meeting them was the big family portrait in the living room.

"If you wanted to come over, or something, that'd be okay. I could give you a key."

Two days ago, if Steve had offered him a key Billy probably would've knocked his teeth in. Then again, two days ago he couldn't imagine a world where Steve ever made that offer. He studied Steve's face for a minute. A whole week, with no company but the t.v. and whatever happened to be on the radio.

"Yeah, I'll take a key." Billy told himself that it was just so he could avoid going back to his own house. The last few days had given him an excuse to care about Steve, but that was gone. It was over now. It had to be, for both their sakes.

Things got strange over the next couple days.

First of all, they didn't look at each other at school. No eye contact if they crossed paths in the hallway, sitting on opposite sides of the room if they shared a class. They both sat alone at lunch, but several tables apart. It was impossible for anybody to guess that Billy had practically moved into the Harrington house.

The only break to their silence was basketball practice. They'd always fought and scuffled on the court, but lately it had gotten vicious. Billy couldn't explain, wouldn't know where to start if he wanted to try. All he knew was that he was pissed, and Steve gave as good as he got. More than once, one of them had been taken down in a surely illegal move.

"That's enough, Hargrove," the couch had snapped, hauling Steve to his feet. "You almost broke his fucking nose."

They stared at each other down. Steve, blood dripping down his chin, looked like he wanted to spit on Billy. It took everything he had in him to rejoin the game instead of beating Harrington into the floorboards.

But he still came over every night with beer and pizza.

Oddly enough, Billy was usually the first one home. He'd show up around 5 or 6 and camp out in front of the t.v. for a few hours. Steve would get in around 11, hair messy, body sore, and this dazed look in his eyes. He'd drop onto the couch beside Billy and swallow down some cold pizza.

They'd talk then, friendly and casual. Like they were friends, just hanging out. Like Billy couldn't smell the alcohol on Steve's breath, or the cologne that didn't belong to either of them that hung off his body. Like he didn't notice the hickeys that crawled up Steve's neck and disappeared under the collar of his wrinkled shirt.

It wasn't great. But it was fine, it was manageable.

Until the rumors about Steve started floating through the school.

It was as if Tuesday morning, Harrington had woken up and decided to fuck every girl in Hawkins. Billy tried to ignore it, but Steve's

sexual escapades where the only thing anyone wanted to talk about. He couldn't help overhearing the conversations in the hallways or between classes.

"Steve Harrington ate me out in the back of his car."

"Harrington made out with me under the bleachers for the whole of sixth period."

"He fingered me under the lab table during biology."

"You won't believe what happened when Steve Harrington-"

Billy wanted to throw up. Or punch something. Both. He kept a lid on it as best he could.

But then he saw Steve wink at the calculus teacher in the halls, and the way she blushed was just too damn telling.

Billy marched across the hall, grabbed Steve by the back of the neck and shoved him into the bathroom. Without even asking, Steve checked the stalls while Billy guarded the door.

"Empty," he reported. His foot tapped impatiently as he waited for Billy to lock the door. "What?"

"What?" Billy couldn't believe his fucking ears. "'What'!?"

"Yes. What?"

"Are you shitting me? Mrs. Peterson?"

Steve's ears burned red with embarrassment. Good, Billy thought. Instead of answering, Steve just shrugged. He'd suddenly taken great interest in the tile pattern of the floor.

"You've got nothing to say for yourself?" Billy waited for an answer that never came. He rolled his eyes exaggeratedly. "Well, this has to stop."

Steve shook his head firmly, eyes coming back up to meet Billy's. "You're not in charge of me."

Billy felt like he was short circuiting. His vision was practically red. He clenched his fists behind his back, struggling to keep them back. “Guys are getting pissed, Steve. They’re ganging up on you, and if they pull something I’m not going to be able to help.”

No response. Just Steve’s determined scowl searing into Billy’s eyes. His fist hit the wall and Steve stepped back, but never changed his facial expression.

“God DAMNIT, Harrington. It was one thing when you were driving to the city every day to get dicked down. Don’t make that face, you weren’t sneaky about it.”

Billy couldn’t help but smile at the surprise on Steve’s face. It was that old, dangerous smile that Max said looked like a shark. This felt normal again. Billy missed the simplicity of hating Steve.

“What?” he continued. “Did you think I didn’t notice the finger shaped bruises on your thighs? Your basketball shorts aren’t long enough. And did you think I wouldn’t notice you coming home reeking of -”

“Don’t. Alright? I get the picture.”

And there it was, laid in front of him. The line that Steve was asking him not to cross.

Billy stepped closer, his body crowding Steve’s against the sinks. He tilted his head to the side. “What’s the matter? Don’t like hearing me talk about you coming home, dripping with cum like a whore?”

Part of Billy was screaming at himself to stop, but it was flooded out by the anger. For a minute, Steve looked like he’d been slapped. His breath came out hard, tickling the exposed part of Billy’s chest.

Then he turned back to Billy, a smug smile on his face. “Whore’s get paid, dumbass. I gave it away for free.” He planted his hands on Billy’s shoulders and shoved him enough to get himself a little space. With one last glare, he unlocked the door.

“See you at home, honey,” he snapped over his shoulder as he walked out.

Billy took a few steadyng breaths. His blood felt like it was boiling, popping and bursting under his skin. He was angry at Steve, furious with himself.

But this wasn't his mess. He didn't get attacked, and he sure as hell didn't kill anybody. Getting involved felt like a mistake. Even so, Billy's stomach churned when he thought about what would've happened if he hadn't.

He punched the mirror, felt his body relax at the sight of his bloody knuckles. And that was the problem. Steve spoke with smiles, soft touches, and hearing his name on another's lips. But the only language Billy knew was violence.

They'd need a translator.

Billy tried not to worry too much when Steve never came home that night.

7. Chapter 7

Steve didn't know what was wrong with him. Just that his whole body ached in a way he could never explain. Every movement hurt, he was so sore. All he knew was that the only way to soothe his pained muscles was to water it down.

The idea had actually come to him from Nancy, while she was explaining what she'd done to bring Barb's family some peace.

"I just watered down the story, made it more consumable." She caught the mildly confused look in his eye. "More tolerable. Like with alcohol that's too strong."

And, huh, wasn't that a thought? Here Steve sat with a shot of whiskey that he knew would burn going down and all he had to do was water it down. He figured if you dumped that shot into a swimming pool and then drank the whole thing, you wouldn't even notice the whiskey in the first place. No burn, no drunkenness. Problem solved.

So he filled his swimming pool, drop by drop. During daylight, the Hawkins girls made him feel like King Steve again. They made him feel wanted, handsome, admirable. And fuck, that felt beyond good. In his mind, he twisted their heavy panting into "I love you"s that he knew he wasn't going to get anywhere else. Each of their heavy sighs was a thick gulp of ice cold water over his desert dry lips.

And at night, he let the men of the nearest city tear him down again. King Steve was dragged from his throne as soon as the sun went down. It took a night of searching, but he finally found a bar with the environment he was looking for. He didn't want any soft sighs or warm touches. Steve needed someone who wasn't afraid to take everything from him. And that felt like getting dragged out to sea by the undertow.

Steve had never wanted to drown as badly as he did now.

He was halfway through a refreshing glass of water with Lindsey Stratton in an empty classroom after school when he heard Billy clear his throat. Instead of turning to look, he slid his hand up her spine and kissed her neck as she shivered beneath him.

“Steve!” she hissed, half giggling as she pushed him back.

He straightened up, giving her a wink before turning to Billy. Behind him, she sat up on the teacher’s desk. She pressed herself against his back, her head on his shoulder and her finger tracing circles over his chest. This felt like the old King Steve, back before Nancy had come along.

“Need something?” he asked, running a hand through his hair.

Billy fixed Lindsey with a glare. “We gotta talk.”

“I’m kinda in the middle of something, Hargrove.”

“You can whore around on your own time, this is important. Tell the skank to get lost.”

“Apologize.”

Billy scoffed. There was a beat before he realized Steve wasn’t kidding.

“Fine, whatever. I’m sorry, Lindsey. Steve, we gotta go.”

A look of shock crossed Steve’s face, but he didn’t say anything. Just nodded his goodbye to Lindsey and followed Billy out into the parking lot. Once they were safely hidden away in the camaro, he punched Billy’s arm.

“Ow! Why?”

There were a couple of reasons. The ache was settling back into his bones, hurting so bad he felt like he was going to throw up. He was still mad at Billy for calling him a whore yesterday (even if it was justified). But all of those were secondary problems at the moment.

“Steve! Steve? You called me Steve in school, in front of Lindsey

Stratton!”

Oh. Shit. For whatever reason, that had become their sacred rule. First names were for playing drunk Uno on the living room floor at 1am. It was like a shared secret, and Billy had blown the lid off of it in front of the biggest gossip in town.

“Yeah, well.” He still felt like he needed to justify himself. “She’ll probably forget about that by the time she sees what I’m about to show you.”

He parked in front of the movie theatre and got out of the car. Steve followed, leaned back against the hood as he looked up at the showtimes.

There, in familiar red paint, the phrase “Steve Harrington is a Slut” was written on the plastic. Billy watched his face as he took in the sight. His lower lip stuck out in a frown, his head titled to the side.

“Yeah, looks about right,” he said with an approving nod of his head.

“What?”

“It’s good, it’s a solid burn.” He waved a hand as if gesturing to a piece in a museum. “The juxtaposition, the creativity. It’s good stuff. Cuts deep.”

“The fuck is wrong with you?”

Steve hit him with a sideways grin. “It’s good, it’s funny. See, last year I thought Nancy was cheating on me with Jonathan Byers and my friends wrote that about her. Same place, same color. It’s great, actually. Uses my own actions against me.”

“Get in the car,” Billy said, shaking his head in disbelief.

He didn’t speak the entire drive. Every time Steve asked a question or started talking, he turned up the radio to drown him out. After parking at the edge of the woods, he switched off the car. Steve’s ears rang in the absence of blaring music, but he didn’t dare complain.

“Are you gonna call me a whore again?” he prodded, eager to get

whatever was coming over with. Waves of intense emotion were radiating off of Billy, and Steve wasn't really sure if he should be scared or not.

"No. I..." Billy paused, took a deep breath. "I want to know why you didn't come home last night." He tried not to think too hard about when he started seeing the Harrington house as 'home.' That was a problem for another day.

"Are you kidding?" Steve asked softly, like he really wasn't sure. When Billy nodded, he let out a huff of breath. "Well, geez Louise. You weren't exactly comforting in the bathroom. I figured you didn't want me."

"It's your house."

Steve just gave a little shrug and crossed his arms over his chest. As he looked out at the woods, the look of fear in his eyes was unmistakable. The flannel he'd wrapped himself in was too big, his hair was a little messy and the dark circles under his eyes were purpling. Billy suddenly felt like Steve Harrington was the softest person in the world.

"You need to talk to me," he said plainly, lighting up a cigarette.

With a gentle shake of his head, Steve slipped another out of Billy's pack and held his hand out for the lighter. For a moment, looking at Steve watch him, cigarette dangling out of the corner of his mouth, Billy understood why Jonathan Byers took so many pictures. He slapped Steve's hand away and reminded himself not to be such a bitch about this.

"No. Gimme some answers first."

"Like what?"

Billy considered ashing his cigarette in the palm of Steve's still outstretched hand. "Anything. Everything."

Steve rubbed his eyes. "Gimme the light."

"Stephen-"

“Don’t ever call me that.” The glare he gave Billy was just the wrong side of tired, a little too soft to be dangerous. “Gimme the light and I’ll tell you.”

Billy hesitated. Steve looked desperate. “Please? I hate being here, I hate the fucking woods.”

He handed over the light, watched the flicker of the flame dance over Steve’s face. After a long drag, Steve started talking.

It was like turning on a faucet and having it get stuck in place. He tried to explain his whiskey vs. swimming pool theory, how he cleaned up the bat and started keeping it in his car again. His whole body felt like it was burning with shame when he explained how good it felt to be treated like shit in the back of some seedy bar, and how easy it was to let it happen.

He was shaking, his body felt like it was breaking down, held together by nothing more than threads. Billy’s hand touched the back of his neck so gently he could’ve mistaken it for a breeze. It tore him apart anyways.

Steve was an open wound. Infected, bleeding, ugly. He was the gaping area where a monster’s face should have been, replaced by petals and teeth. He was the empty feeling of hitting the bottom of a bottle of tequila alone on a tuesday night. He was broken and hollow, and somehow he ended up in Billy Hargrove’s lap.

His hands fisted in that button up shirt, his face was buried in the crook of Billy’s neck. Billy didn’t know what the fuck he was doing. He’d had a few girls break down and cry around him before, and he usually just left them to it.

But this felt different. Billy felt every restrained sob like a bullet. Somewhere along the way, Steve had become his responsibility. Maybe it was watching him cry laughing at some stupid late night variety show, or watch him burn his pancakes black every damn morning. Maybe it was listening to him sing off key in the shower. Or waking up to a fluffy mass of brown hair and pillow lines on the side of his face. But at some point, Steve stopped being an obligation and started being something Billy looked forward too.

He held Steve tight, as if he could squeeze the pain out of him. His gaze tried to focus on the trees, but found them watery and unclear. Soft words that didn't really mean anything were falling from his lips.

Steve pulled back as suddenly as he came in. He laughed harshly, brushed his hand through his hair. "Wow. What a fucking pansy," he choked out with a scratchy voice.

Billy picked up the cigarette from where it had fallen into the cup holder. He relit it and pressed it carefully to Steve's lips.

"I'm sorry," Steve said. He was chewing on the butt more than actually smoking. Usually Billy hated that, but he found it a little endearing when it was Steve. "Can we go home? I really fucking hate the woods."

"Of course." It took Billy a second to get his body to do what his voice had promised. "Yeah, absolutely." He ruffled Steve's hair, felt his heart melt at the little smile it earned him. "Let's get you home, sweetheart."

His choice of words didn't even dawn on him until he was already home.

8. Chapter 8

Notes for the Chapter:

I've got a more clear plan, but I'm still open to suggestions! The ones i've gotten have been great, and I'm planning on using most of the ones that I haven't already used. It's fun when someone suggests something I was already planning on doing, it feels like we're in kahoots.

Thanks for all the support, it's greatly appreciated!

Steve's parents came home. Obviously, Billy always knew they would, but it still stung when he realized one morning that he couldn't come back.

And honestly? Dealing with the whirlwind of bad shit that had hit Steve had made it pretty easy for Billy to forget about his own demons. He still cared, of course. It was just a little harder to think about Steve when he was getting his ass beat on the regularly again.

And then there was the situation of how Billy felt about Steve. Once he wasn't seeing the boy as frequently and was back to having hating queers drilled into his head, it was harder to remember why he'd helped. And one day during basketball practice, he realized that he'd forgotten why he'd ever liked Steve in the first place.

He was watching Steve run drills, looping the ball around his waist to practice handling. Steve just looked so pretty and agile while he focused on the task at hand. Billy was almost smiling to himself when Neil's voice reading Bible quotes hit him like a headache. Then all he wanted to do was break something.

They were the last two left in the locker rooms, Billy was taking his sweet time and Steve was stalling. As soon as the door shut behind the last teammate, he dropped playfully onto the bench beside Billy.

"You know, sometimes when he's away I think my dad isn't so bad, ya know? And then he comes home and it's like being reminded what

an asshole he is all the time,” he started, his tone light and friendly.

Billy’s jaw clenched. What the fuck did Steve know about asshole dads? He didn’t answer, just focused on tying his shoes.

Steve could tell something was up, but he didn’t know what. He kept talking, an edge of nervousness creeping into his voice. “Do you wanna go to the movies or something? We could go a town or two over, where nobody’ll recognize us.”

Billy stopped, slowly turned to Steve with a glare. “Do you think we’re friends or something?” he asked.

“No. I mean, I dunno. Well, yeah. Wait, aren’t we?” he babbled, clearly taken aback. Quickly, he scuffled through his memories, trying to figure out what he’d done wrong.

“You think that just because you cried like a little bitch in my car we’re best buddies or something?” Billy scoffed and Steve tried not to flinch. “That’s fucking pathetic.”

“You... what? You stayed at my house for a week.” He looked so confused and hurt, his forehead wrinkling and his eyes darting side to side. As if he was trying to physically see what had gone wrong.

“Free food. Free booze. Not having to deal with my family.” Billy counted on his fingers as he spoke and then rolled his eyes at the hurt look on Steve’s face. “Jesus Christ, this is sad.”

He got up to leave and was surprised when Steve caught him by the edge of his jacket. “I just, wait. Will you slow down? What did I do?”

“Holy fuck.” Billy let out a harsh laugh and batted Steve’s hand away. “You’re absolutely braindead, Harrington.”

He caught a glimpse of Steve’s face in the mirror as he left. A small part of him felt awful and wanted to turn around, go comfort him. But it was stamped out by the rest of him that was still bubbling with anger.

The next day, Steve dropped in front of Billy in the library. He barely glanced over the top of his book. Even as he rolled his eyes, Billy had

to admit that he was impressed. He knew Steve was brave, but he didn't think he'd have the gall to keep pushing.

"Listen. I don't know what I did or what happened. But you can't just ditch me, not after all that," he said firmly.

Billy raised his eyebrows. "You mean, after all that shit that you did? Because that's not connected to me." He liked his thumb and turned the page.

"You lived in my house. It was your idea to go back." Steve scowled at the lack of response. "You brushed my fucking teeth."

"You killed somebody," Billy responded, but only after glancing around to make sure nobody could overhear.

"You're an accessory, you helped me clean the bat, sweetheart."

Billy slammed the book on the table. Steve jumped at the sound. He could feel anxiety swelling in his chest as those blue eyes studied him carefully. His brain was firing off his fears unstoppably. 'He hates you, he always has. You should've sucked his dick so he'd still like you. You're worthless and he knows it.'

"If you ever bring that up again, I'll fucking kill you. Got it?" Billy said. Steve didn't answer, just stared him dead in the eyes. "Got it, Harrington?" he pushed.

Steve braced himself before speaking. "I don't know what's going on, but you told me you were afraid to go home a few days ago. Is it your dad? Is he being an asshole?"

"Bring up my dad again and I'll put you in the fucking E.R."

"Doing that won't fix anything. Are you pushing me away because of him? Are you scared he'll find out?"

It had been awhile since Billy had truly wanted to kill Steve. He wanted to knock him on his ass, maybe bruise up that pretty face. But he hadn't wanted to kill him in a solid month.

He didn't know exactly why he wanted Harrington dead. He wanted

to keep hating him because it was so much easier. When he wasn't home he could deal with complicated things, like the fondness he had growing for the person he was supposed to hate. But he was too drained, physically and emotionally to deal with that now. And it didn't help that Steve was almost on the nose with his guesses. The one thing Billy hated most was people knowing shit about him.

"Shut up before I-"

"What, Billy?" Fuck, it felt so good and so bad to hear his first name on Steve's lips. "You'll kill me? Cave in my face? You keep threatening me but we both know you won't do shit."

Maybe Steve had a death wish, because he felt the tension in his body relax when Billy said "Meet me outside or I'll drag you there." He wasn't sure if his intention had been to antagonize Billy from the start, but he knew he needed this now.

It was the closest thing to therapy they were ever going to get. Billy needed something to destroy, Steve needed something to destroy him. Each hit felt right, like Billy's fist was built for Steve's cheek. It felt more like a waltz than a fight.

Steve's feet followed the gentle swaying beat. He stepped back as Billy stepped forward, they spun around each other slowly. Billy's hit to his jaw was his cue to give a spin, sloppy and uneven but on beat nevertheless. The way he grabbed onto the lapels of Billy's jacket could only be described as tender. And the way Billy shoved him against the wall of the dirty alleyway could only be described as sweet.

When Billy let go, Steve crumpled to the ground. He watched him struggle into a sitting position, leaning back against the cold brick. His breath was coming out ragged and heavy. His lips were red with blood, and just as beautiful as when they'd been stained with lipstick.

"Hopper's investigating the murder," he panted out, right as Billy started to walk away.

He froze dead in his tracks, grateful that Steve couldn't see the pure fear that settled on his face. He covered it by lighting a cigarette. "That's your problem, isn't it?"

"It's our problem. You're in this with me."

Billy walked back over and crouched beside him. He pressed the cigarette to Steve's lips, watched the exhale of smoke curl around his battered face. For a second, he wanted to kiss that spot where the wrinkle formed between his eyebrows every time he frowned.

"I'm not in shit with you, sweetheart," he stated plainly.

He plucked the cigarette from Steve's lips and brought it back to his own. Tilting his head, he held Steve's in his hand and just looked at him for a second. He let the moment sit, let their breaths, visible in the cold air, mingle between them. When it was over, he pressed the hot end of the cigarette to the side of Steve's neck.

The cry of pain Steve let out cut him to his absolute core. But it was better than letting him get too close.

9. Chapter 9

A week passed. They glanced at each other in the halls, but didn't talk. Steve averted his eyes if they made contact. Billy let that familiar cold feeling settle back in his chest.

Things were back to normal, back to simple. It was exactly what Billy had wanted. He'd gotten too close, gotten scared and wanted back out. But now that he was out, it felt worse than before.

He couldn't stop that Steve was the only thing he could think about. His bed felt painfully empty, and the lack of drunken laughter made his world unsettlingly quiet. Billy missed Steve. But he had finally pushed him until he broke and that was that. All he could do now was remind himself that it was what he wanted.

He started stalling after basketball practice, watching Steve out of the corner of his eyes. Most days, the other would skip the shower, get out as quick as he could. But today, he seemed to be stalling too.

When they were finally alone, neither of them spoke for a minute. Billy could see that Steve was working himself up to something.

"Need something?" he spat. Why was he such an asshole? It wasn't as harsh as it could've been, but it was still a clear "Don't come any closer."

Harrington pointedly ignored it. He stalked over and dropped a familiar key on a Mickey Mouse keychain into Billy's hand. "My parents are gone for another week." He said it as if he was telling Billy to leave alone, almost meanly.

Billy blinked at the keyring and turned it in his hands. Harrington was already gone. A gentle warmth prickled painfully in his chest.

With still healing bruises, Steve invited him back. Wasn't that a fucking kick in the face? Billy had pulled every trick in the book to box Steve out of his life. He'd torn down the bridge with his own bare hands before burning it. And in response, Steve Harrington had built a fucking boat.

He either had balls of steel, or was dumb as hell. Billy couldn't have stopped smiling if he wanted to.

It was already dark by the time Steve got home, which wasn't a surprise. Winter sunset came around far too early anyways.

As he shuffled out of his sneakers, he noticed a beam of light spreading from under the kitchen door. Billy's car wasn't hidden around the corner, so he was out of the question. Steve aimed for relaxed and natural as he walked in.

"Mom? I didn't think you guys would be back until- Fuck."

Hopper was sitting at the kitchen table, drinking from Mr. Harrington's collection of good wines. He fixed Steve with The Look, which usually only happened when he pulled him over for speeding. It had been a good couple of months since Steve had last been given The Look.

"Am I in trouble?" he asked.

The Look morphed into one of more exasperation than anger. "Take a guess."

There was a brief pause. "No?" he offered.

"Take another."

His palms were sweating. Hopper's handcuffs and gun were on the table instead of clipped to his belt like usual.

"Can I just stick with my original answer?"

"Stephen-"

"Don't ever call me that."

Hopper closed his eyes, sighed, and nodded. "Right, sorry. Just, take a seat, kid."

Steve slid into the chair on the opposite side of the table. He couldn't stop shaking his leg no matter how hard he tried. His attempts at casual were pathetic, and Hopper saw right through it all.

"What's this about?" he asked.

"We found a body. Some drummer from a band passing through. He was clearly murdered at a party."

"Oh, man. Oh, wowie. That is just. Yikes. Ya know? Yikes all the way." Steve swallowed hard. "So do you like, you want my help or something?"

"You're the only suspect."

"Well, jeepers! Me? I didn't, I wouldn't!"

"Steve—"

"Me, though? Li'l Ol' Steve Harrington? A murderer?"

Hopper hit his hand on the table. Steve jumped, shut his mouth so hard his teeth clacked together. Calming down, Hopper rubbed his eyes. They were dark and bloodshot, he'd been losing sleep.

"You're the only one in town with a spiked bat," he explained, tiredly but almost kindly.

Steve was studying his hands. His throat felt stuffed with cotton.
"You don't know that for sure."

"Listen, alright? Nobody knows I'm here. Nobody knows I know it was you. So if you can just give me a valid reason, we can talk about sweeping this under the rug." Hopper's tone was that same exasperated huff, but Steve knew him well enough to know this was a kind gesture. Very kind, actually. He didn't even really understand why. It's not like Hopper had ever really liked him.

He was studying Steve's every move. If he wasn't convinced who the murderer was, it must've been clear now. Steve dug the heels of his hands into his eyes.

“No, I... I can’t, Hop. I’m sorry, but I can’t do it. I won’t.” He really tried to keep his voice from wavering. He was an adult, for God’s sake. It was humiliating.

Now it was Hopper’s turn to rub his eyes. “Whatever it is, it can’t be that bad.” He waited, but Steve didn’t budge. The Look came back. “I’ll come back tomorrow. Give me any reason and I’ll see what I can do.” His gaze was making Steve squirm. “If you tell me the real reason and I can really help you. Do you understand?”

“Are you telling me to lie to you?”

Hopper stood up and walked around the table. His big hand clapped onto Steve’s shoulder and rubbed it kindly. “I’m asking for the truth, but I’m giving you options.” He lit up a cigarette and Steve flinched away automatically. He raised an eyebrow but didn’t address it. “Oh, and I’m bringing Joyce tomorrow.”

“That’s not fair!” Nobody could lie to Joyce. If she wanted the truth, she got it, end of story. Bringing her along to get a confession was probably the dirtiest trick in the book.

Ruffling Steve’s hair, Hopper give him a smile that wasn’t unkind. It should’ve been comforting but it just made Steve’s heart sink to his feet. The officer let himself out the door, leaving Steve just sitting alone at the kitchen table. He didn’t move, couldn’t move for a bit. The wine looked more tempting with every passing second.

Billy paused before going inside. Part of him wondered if it was all some elaborate. Like he would walk in and Steve would throw a pie in his face and call him a pussy. It seemed unlikely, but he ducked his head as he walked through the door anyways.

Steve was laying flat on his back in the living room, a Madonna record blaring and his second bottle of wine cradled against his side. When he heard the door open he used his feet to slide himself up until his head poked into the hallway. As soon as his eyes landed on Billy, his face broke into a lopsided grin.

“Well, well, well. If it ain’t Mr., Mr. Hargrove. Fancy seeing you here.” He wriggled his eyebrows playfully and gave an exaggerated wink. “Here to finish what you started behind the library?”

Billy, who had walked closer as he spoke, was now standing directly over him. “Holy fuck. You’re drunk.”

“Hell yeah, baby.” Steve squirmed his way back into the living room, humming along to the music. Billy followed, feeling more and more like a toddler’s parent.

“Is that such a good idea? Last time didn’t go super great.” He picked up the empty bottle which looked like it had been flung onto the couch. “Shit, this is your dad’s good stuff. He’s gonna be pissed.”

“He’s gonna have bigger fish to fry.” Steve struggled to sit up, leaning back on his hands and smiling widely. “We’re celebrating.” He wiggled his eyebrows again.

“Don’t do that with your face. What’re we celebrating, Stevie?” It was scary, how easy it was for Billy to slip back into this. He almost could’ve forgotten all the terrible shit he did. The circular burn mark, still pink and shiny on Steve’s neck, wouldn’t let him though.

“It’s my, tomorrow I will, I gotta.” Steve stopped to swallow and recollect his thoughts. “I’m goin’ to jail.”

“What?” Billy’s heart jumped to his throat.

“Yep.” Steve popped the “p” so hard he almost tipped over. “Tune in tomorrow, same time same channel. Hop’s gonna haul me off.”

“I’m not gonna let that happen.” He really meant it, but Steve just snorted in his face.

“Cool, thanks. ‘Cuz you’ve been soooo helpful lately.”

“I wanted to talk about that-”

“I dunno what went down, but I’m mad.” Steve had to focus on pulling his face into a scowl. Was it always this hard to move and talk at the same time? “I’m dealin’ with, with some shit, ya know.

Things've been fuckin' bad lately. And then my best friend just cuts me off? Bull~shit, Billy Hargrove.”

“I know, I know, you didn’t deserve that. But I-”

“Man, I don’t even wanna hear it. No sadness. This is my last night, I just wanna feel good. Hey, you should skip school tomorrow with me!”

Billy sat cross legged on the floor across from Steve. He felt sick to his stomach, watching him sway as if just sitting there was a huge effort. It was his fault Steve was like this and knowing that hurt worse than Neil.

“We need to have a serious talk.” It was easier to do knowing that Steve was probably too drunk to remember. Maybe if it went well, he could approach the subject again in the morning.

“Psh, that’s gross. Hey, let’s play spin the bottle!”

“There’s only two of us here.”

Steve snatched the empty bottle from him and put it on the ground. He spun it and pouted when it ended up pointing at the wall. “Okay, your turn.”

“Maybe we should-”

“Just spin!”

Billy rolled his eyes but spun. It landed on nothing again. “I really want to talk about what happened.”

“I don’t.” Steve spun. This time the bottle ended up pointing directly at Billy.

He barely registered what that meant by the time that Steve had closed the distance. It had been a couple years since he’d played, but Billy was pretty sure most people didn’t hunker down in the lap of whoever they were kissing. Steve was already settled, his hands cupping Billy’s face.

His lips were so soft. Billy didn't even kiss back at first, too stunned at how soft they were. Steve was so lovely, fit so perfectly against him, and his thumbs were stroking little circles against Billy's cheeks. It would've been a crime not to kiss him back.

When they pulled away, Billy was surprised to see how melancholy he looked. He brushed the mop of brown hair away from Steve's face and frowned back.

"Are you gonna go home now?" Steve asked, tilting his head to study Billy's face better.

"I was kinda planning to stay the night."

Steve nodded and then pushed himself back. He dropped onto the carpet, his legs still tangled with Billy's. "You can go whenever you want. You don't, you shouldn't stay just because, you don't have to."

"I want to stay." Billy took one of his hands in his own, but Steve quickly slipped away to scratch an itch by his shoulder.

"No, you don't. If you did, you wouldn't have..." His fingers traced over the little burn on his neck. Suddenly, he shook his head and smiled. "No way, I don't wanna be sad. Fuck, I love this song!"

He hauled himself to his feet and stumbled over to the record player to crank the volume. In the process, he managed to take a few more sips of wine before Billy caught him.

"I think you've had enough," he said, setting the bottle down.

"Yeah? Well, I think you're an asshole who takes his daddy issues out on me because I'm-"

Billy shoved him back and he fell flat on his ass. In response, he gave Billy a kick to the knee that almost brought him down too.

"I'm fucking sick of this!" The raw pain in Steve's voice drained the anger out of Billy like a popped balloon. "You can either be my friend or you can beat me up, but you can't do both."

Billy crouched down in front of him, but Steve still wouldn't meet his

eyes. “Why’d you invite me here?” Steve just shook his head and squeezed his eyes shut. “Harrington, c’mon.”

Steve waited for a moment. When he spoke, it was so quiet Billy could barely hear it over the music. “I didn’t know if you’d be nice to me or if you’d hurt me, but I wanted both.” He focused his eyes on Billy’s and he just looked sad. Not poetically or beautifully, just sad. “You just go back and forth too fast. Pick one, okay? Just for tonight?”

“Yeah, okay. I can be nice.” Billy watched him nod his head sloppily. Steve started chewing on his lower lip, like he usually did when he was deep in thought. “What’s going on in that pretty little head of yours?” he asked.

“I don’t shampoo my eyebrows. Is that something you’re supposed to do? Am I gonna get eyebrow dandruff?”

Billy smiled and pulled Steve over to the couch. “I think you’ll be okay.” He pushed Steve until he sat and then dropped down beside him.

“Do you wanna know a secret?” Steve fell sideways so his head rested in Billy’s lap. He looked up at him with a dopey smile that Billy couldn’t resist smiling back to.

“What kind of secret?”

“A really big one. If anyone finds out I told you, they’ll kill me. You in?”

Billy rolled his eyes. “Sure.”

“Okay, so there’s like...” Steve waved his hand around. “Lab, I guess? And they do weird shit there. Like, they used to have this portal to another dimension or some shit.”

“Another dimension?”

“Yeah, dude!” He sat up, stared Billy dead in the eyes. “It’s called the Upside Down and it’s like, crazy. There’s this thing called the demogorgon and it’s like...” His lower lip stuck out in a pout. “It’s

like a big slimy dude, but with no face.”

This felt dangerous. Billy had never spoken to a crazy person before, and he didn’t know if he was supposed to go along with their theories. Either way, Steve seemed deadly serious and disagreeing with him might cause problems. He’d promised to be nice, hadn’t he?

“No face?”

“Yeah, it just...” Steve pressed his palms together and held them in front of his face, fingertips aimed at Billy. Slowly, he unfurled his fingers. “It just opens up. Like a flower. And there are dogs like that too.”

“Dogs?” Billy grabbed Steve’s wrists lightly and held them against his chest. The more he heard, the more nervous he got. How far off the deep end had Harrington gone?

“Yeah. They almost killed me and Dustin. It was the scariest moment of my life, even worse than... you know, the thing. And worse than when Hopper told me I had to tell him why I killed that guy or I would go to jail.”

“Wait, if you tell him then you don’t have to go to jail?”

Steve nodded and curled into Billy’s side.

“That’s great! Just tell him!”

“I feel sick.”

“Steve, this is good! You don’t have to go to jail.”

“I’m not gonna tell him. Is the world spinning for you too?”

“Why wouldn’t you tell him?” Billy grabbed his shoulders and faced him. Steve’s head was flopping uselessly.

“Are you kidding?” He scoffed and then grabbed Billy. “I’m not mad at you for all that bullshit. I mean, I am, but I’m trying not to be, ya know? Because I get it. You know?”

“I know.” When had Steve gotten back in Billy’s lap? He knew that most physical boundaries went out the window when Steve met alcohol, but this was ridiculous. It was like Billy was a magnet and he was a paperclip.

“Because like, I’m just the way I am. And I know that that’s hard on people. So it’s okay if you’re still mad at me, because I am too. Mad at me, I mean. Not mad at you.” He wrinkled his nose. “Well, I am, but I’m really trying not to be-”

“I know what you mean-”

“-Because it’s not really your fault, is it?” He was braiding Billy’s mullet now, his fingers fumbling. “It’s not your fault I’m like this.”

“I wasn’t mad at you. Not really.” Billy held his hands in his own, rested his lips on their braid of knuckles. “I was just mad. And you were just there.”

It wasn’t really that simple, but he didn’t think Steve could handle the whole thing with his brain waterlogged with alcohol. Billy barely understood it and he lived it.

They were both staring at their hands. Steve glanced at Billy, his anxiety palpable in the air.

“Are you gay?” he asked.

Billy didn’t know what to say. He just kept looking at how well their hands fit together, as if nobody had spoken.

“I am,” Steve whispered. “Sometimes, I mean. I like girls too, but I’m also gay. Does that-”

“Bisexual.”

“Huh?”

“You’re bisexual.” He wrapped his hand around the back of Steve’s head and tugged him close.

Back in California, he’d kissed enough boys to know what to expect.

But nothing could've prepared him for Steve Harrington. He was so gentle, and his lips moved slowly. He let Billy take the lead, let him set the pace. The little noises he made sounded so soft, and his body just kept pressing closer. His chest pushed into Billy's but he still kept trying to squirm closer. Like he was drowning and Billy was dry land.

Kissing Steve was like watching flowers bloom, like opening a Christmas present slowly so as not to rip the wrapping paper. Kissing Steve was sunday mornings, when he could sleep in late and make a real breakfast. Kissing Steve was coming home.

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

I love Nancy Wheeler and I want her to get the respect she deserves.

Thanks for all the lovely support! As always, comments and suggestions are both accepted and appreciated!

Steve poked his head into the living room. “Hey, you know what we should do?” he asked.

“What?” Billy turned to look at him, but didn’t get up from the couch. Before leaving for the bathroom, Steve insisted that he stay put. And even though that felt like a bad idea, Billy listened.

“We should invite over Jonathan and Nancy.” He sat on the floor, deciding that the struggle of getting to the couch was too much.

Billy twitched. “No, Steve. That’s a bad idea. Do you understand?”

“Well, I really only wanted to invite Nancy but Jonathan was there when I called and I like Jonathan so I wasn’t going to tell him he couldn’t-”

“You already invited them? Are you kidding me? They can’t know I’m here!”

Steve fixed him with a look. “Well, why not?”

“People aren’t supposed to know we’re friends.”

“Why not?” Steve tried to stand up but gave up quickly and settled for crossing his arms to show his frustration. “Are you embarrassed of me or something?”

“It’s more complicated than that-” The doorbell cut Billy off. He pinched the bridge of his nose and tried to relax. Nice. Billy could be nice for one night to appease Steve. Even if he was being pushed to

his limits.

“It’s party time!” Steve scrambled on his hands and knees to the coffee table, which he used to stand. Watching him stumble around was almost amusing if it wasn’t for the very real threat of alcohol poisoning.

Billy could hear them chatting in the entryway, Steve far too loud. He could hear the way Jonathan and Nancy still spoke to Steve with patience and softness. It didn’t sound like the first time they’d found him in this state, and Billy started to wonder if they’d done this before.

Nancy cut herself off mid sentence when she saw Billy sitting on the couch in the living room. She turned to Steve, her expression a carefully practiced patient smile. “Why is he here?” she asked.

“Oh, he’s just, uh. You know how it is. He’s just hangin’ out.” When she glanced back to share a look with Jonathan, Steve shot a thumbs up at Billy. This was getting hard to watch.

“Hey, why don’t we have a chat in the kitchen?” She started nudging Steve towards the other room. Jonathan seemed like he wanted to protest but decided against it suddenly.

When they reached the kitchen, Nancy shut the door behind them and leaned against it. She took a deep breath before starting. “Are you and Billy Hargrove friends?”

“I can explain,” Steve said. She waited and he realized that that meant he actually had to explain. “He’s nice to me.”

“He beat you up last week.”

“He’s nice to me, like, 65% of the time.”

“Steve!”

“That’s over half!” He crossed his arms and leaned back against the table. “We just, I dunno. We get along.”

“That doesn’t make any sense, you’re...” She trailed off and pursed

her lips like when she was right about to figure out a math equation. “Wait. Shared trauma.”

“Whatever you’re thinking, just stop. Okay?” He’d really been thinking of playing Monopoly or something with the three of them, not having Nancy try to unpack his emotional problems.

“Think about it, it makes sense.”

“I don’t wanna think about it.”

“Max said that Neil doesn’t treat Billy that great, and your dad-”

“What are you trying to say?” He tried to make his voice sound menacing, but Nancy knew him far too well for that.

“I’m just saying that you and Billy might have more in common than you originally thought.”

“My dad is not abusive, Nancy,” Steve said exasperatedly. He shook his head and rubbed his eye with the heel of his hand. “I can’t believe we’re doing this again.”

“I’ve seen the way he treats you, I’ve seen the way you get nervous when he-”

“I can’t believe that we’re broken up and still having this conversation. That’s crazy to you too, right?” He focused on calming himself down before continuing. “Billy and I just had a bonding moment at a party. That’s it. He’s still an asshole, we just... It’s complicated.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Complicated?”

“Yeah.” He could feel her studying him, and it was truly starting to make him nervous. Nancy was just too smart. “What?”

“You’re making the moves on him.”

“Jesus, ‘making the moves’? What is this, 1974?”

She crossed her arms and rose her eyebrows expectantly. Steve wasn’t

going to get out of this.

“We kissed. Twice. Just tonight, nothing else has-”

“Tonight?” Anger flooded through Nancy’s body. She set her jaw and pulled the door open. “Jonathan, will you make Steve some coffee? I’m gonna have a chat with Billy.”

She and Jonathan switched places and for the first time, Billy felt real fear looking at her. It was ridiculous. She was tiny and a total nerd, but Billy still felt like he was about to get his ass handed to him.

There was a long pause as she waited for Jonathan and Steve to start talking. “You kissed him tonight.”

“I’m not gay, he came onto me, alright? I didn’t corrupt your little-”

“Shut up,” she interrupted, rolling her eyes at his condescending tone. “I don’t give a shit about that. He’s drunk, Billy!”

“So?”

“So! So he’s not thinking clearly! You took advantage of him.”

That struck a chord with Billy. He rose to his feet, but wasn’t sure what he wanted to do when he got there. “You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about,” he said. “I would never hurt Steve-”

She laughed harshly to cut him off. As made as he was, Billy finally understood why Steve had loved her so much. Nancy was a “take no shit” unstoppable force, and it was beautiful.

“Tell that to that his face! You almost caved it in!”

“I would never hurt Steve like that.”

“Oh, so almost killing him in his fine but you draw the line at sexual assault?”

“Yes.”

Something in his tone must have gotten through to her. She didn’t

relax or back down, but she made it clear she wouldn't push anymore. Of course, that didn't make her any more approving.

"If you and Steve are gonna be all buddy buddy, you've gotta shape up. Maybe he's willing to put up with your shit, but I'm not."

"You sure seem to care a lot about someone you broke up with," Billy said, cocking an eyebrow questioningly.

"We broke up, but I still love him."

"You did a great job convincing him otherwise, anyways."

She clenched her jaw and looked towards the door. "I just don't love him romantically."

"Listen, I see where you're coming from. I really do, and you're right. But you can't be mad at me for hurting him when you did that too."

A sense of understanding seemed to pass between them. Maybe they wouldn't be friends, but they could find a balance. They could keep each other in check.

And maybe Billy had a little more respect for the girl who broke Steve's heart. If nothing else, it would be nice to know that someone would help him break Steve out of jail if things went wrong.

11. Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

Hit me up with any suggestions, even for other fics like oneshots or anything! Love comments and feedback, thank you so much!

"I killed him because..." Steve paused, swallowed. He couldn't look Hopper in the eye. "He tried to rape me. Twice."

Saying it out loud hurt. But not as bad as the snort of laughter Hopper gave. Steve sunk lower into his seat at the kitchen table.

"Jesus Christ, that's not a good reason at all. You probably deserved it."

Steve flinched, which made the cop laugh and shake his head.

"I bet you liked it. Steve 'The Slut' Harrington, right? Why don't you come here and-"

Steve bolted awake so violently that his foot knocked every piece of Clue off the board. Not that it mattered, everyone had passed out hours ago. The game had just been sitting there for hours while the four of them slept around it.

His mouth felt painfully dry, which was ironic because the rest of his body felt slick with sweat. He pushed his bangs back from his forehead and took deep breaths. Hopper would never. Would he?

Truthfully, Steve didn't have great memories of Hopper. He and Steve's dad had been best friends turned worst enemies in high school, for reasons Steve never knew. But he did know that Hopper tended to have far less patience for anything 'Harrington' related.

He'd eased up since the whole Upside Down business, but Steve still had enough memories of being hauled down to the station for pointless things to fuel that fire. It was like Hopper had been waiting to throw him in jail since he was 12, and now here was the opportunity. Steve didn't understand why he wouldn't just take it.

“You good?”

Steve turned to Jonathan and gave an easy going smile. “When am I not?”

“Always. Lately, at least,” Jonathan replied with a shrug.

“I almost miss when you never talked back to me,” Steve said, shaking his head and smiling. He repositioned to lean back against the couch beside the other boy.

“Will gets them too.”

“Huh?”

“Nightmares.”

“Don’t worry about me, alright? I’m not 12.” It was meant to be a joke, but Jonathan didn’t laugh. Not that he ever laughed at Steve’s jokes, but sometimes he would fake a chortle to be polite. That would’ve been nice.

“It’s from the trauma. You know, if you ever wanna talk about-”

“I don’t. But thank you.” He dragged a hand over his face and cushioned his chin in his knees.

“You saw all the shit we did. More than me and Nance. It’s perfectly reasonable if you’re-”

“Please, Byers. I’m okay.”

Jonathan glanced at Nancy to make sure she was sleeping soundly. “She gets them too, ya know? My mom too, sometimes.”

“Do you?”

“Of course. Did you see that thing? It was... Jesus, it was fucked, ya know?”

“I know.” Steve couldn’t help it. He dropped his head onto Jonathan’s shoulder and hoped it wouldn’t be a problem. “Your mom’s coming

over tomorrow to pry secrets out of me for Hopper.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what they want.”

Jonathan smiled and shook his shoulder to jostle Steve’s head.
“You’re not a great liar.”

That got Steve sitting upright. “Excuse you. I’ll have you know that I was an up and coming child star!”

“You were in one commercial and it was for your dad’s company.”

“And it was magnificent!”

The pillow hit him in the face at the same moment that Jonathan’s laugh started. A real one this time.

“Keep it down, you’ll wake everyone up.”

“So? Maybe then we can finish the game.” Steve looked down at the scattered board game. He shifted his foot around, just to watch the pieces tumble around a little.

“Why? I already know who did it.”

Steve grinned. He couldn’t explain it, but whenever Jonathan won whatever game they were playing (which was always) he got this strange excitement. Better than when he was winning.

He just couldn’t believe that the same kid who could hardly look him in the eyes now gave that small smile when he watched Steve beg for a loan in Monopoly. Not that Jonathan gave out loans. He cried for a week when he killed a rabbit at ten, but apparently watching the light die in Steve’s eyes had no effect on him.

“Nuh uh.” He started digging around to find the envelope.

“Yeah.” Jonathan was smiling now too, like he was trying to hold it back but just couldn’t. “Professor Plum in the ballroom with the wrench.”

“No!” Steve pulled open the envelope and read the cards. He studied Jonathan’s face for a minute before reading them again. Suddenly, he threw them in the other’s general direction. “You’re such a cheat, Byers!”

Jonathan shushed him between soft laughs. “Keep it down, keep it down. I’m not a cheat.”

“You gotta be. You only made it into one room.”

“You wanna know how I did it?” He looked around, as if he was about to tell Steve the biggest secret in the world. “I watch you guys. I can usually guess which piece you cross off by your faces and roughly where you put your pencil.”

“No way. That’s for sure cheating.”

“It’s not cheating, it’s just... not quite following the rules.”

Steve settled back into his side, practically curling in Jonathan’s lap. At that moment, Steve realized how much he appreciated Byers. Having a friend was great, especially one that he didn’t need to perform for. Tommy needed constant entertainment, and Billy was too much of a wildcard to fully relax with (yet). But Jonathan Byers was stable and nice.

“You’re touchy when you’re drunk,” Jonathan said.

“Does it bother you?”

“No, it’s fine. Just funny.

“Funny?”

“Yeah, because when you’re sober you’re so... not.”

“Excuse you?”

“It’s true. If it isn’t sexual, you don’t touch. You stay about a foot away all the time.”

Turning his head, Steve grumbled into Jonathan’s shoulder. “You’re

know too much.” Then, after a pause, he sat up again. “Hey, you should skip with me tomorrow.”

“You and Billy?”

“Yeah.”

“No.”

Steve’s face slipped into a pout. “Why not?”

“No offense, but Billy’s an asshole.”

“He gets better over time.”

“Yeah?” Jonathan didn’t need to say any more than that. His gaze was so lazer focused on the still healing cigarette burn that Steve could feel it.

With a shameful redness growing on his cheeks, Steve pulled the collar of his sweater up to hide it. It didn’t do anything, but it at least got Jonathan to look away.

“Does it hurt?” he asked, his now turned to watch Billy Hargrove’s slowly rising and falling chest.

“No.”

“If you’re scared of him or something, I could… I mean, I wouldn’t be opposed to-”

Steve punched his shoulder. “Don’t kill anybody on my behalf, I can do that myself.”

Jonathan fixed him with a soft smile that was so gentle and intimate it damn near broke Steve’s heart. “I know. But sometimes it’s easier with help.”

Steve laid back down onto the ground, holding a pillow to his chest. “I don’t need help,” he said.

And he made a point to not think about how much easier it was to

fall asleep while knowing Jonathan was watching over him.

12. Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

Guess who forgot to keep writing? Me! Anyways, here's this. If you have any requests, let me know. Comments are loved as always, and hopefully there'll be more coming soon!

Steve woke up to an empty living room and the smell of something delicious. He sat up, rubbing his sore eyes and blinking at the way the sunlight streamed in from the windows.

The hangover hit him like a semi, his own nausea knocking him back down to the ground. Groaning, he curled up on his side, tucking his head between his knees.

Something was pressing into his back. He tried to ignore it, but it was persistent. His hand shot out, wrapped around a tiny plastic revolver that he launched over his shoulder.

“Ouch!” Billy’s head snapped back as the game piece hit right between his eyes. It didn’t really hurt, his reaction more from shock than anything else. That didn’t stop him from kicking just a little harder. “You asshole, I made you pancakes.”

He waited to see if Steve would react, but he didn’t move a muscle. “C’mon, sit up.”

“Fuck you.”

“I’ve got painkillers, don’t be a brat.” He squatted down, gently coaxed Steve upright before pressing the pills into his hands. Steve threw them both back, holding Billy with his other hand to keep steady.

“Better?” Billy asked.

“Do you not know how medicine works?”

Instead of answering, Billy hit him with a pillow. As Steve curled

deeper into the sweater he was wearing, Billy recognized it as Jonathan's. A pang of something (jealousy?) shot through his chest.

"Did you say something about pancakes?" Steve asked, his voice muffled by the hood.

"You have to walk to the kitchen. Think you can manage?" Billy couldn't help the way he reached out to ruffle that mess of hair as Steve pushed himself upright.

He kept his hand on the small of Steve's back as they made their way to the table. Steve made a face at the plate piled high in the center.

"Blueberry? What the fuck, there are chocolate chips on the counter."

"Sugar'll just make you crash, you ungrateful brat. You can't have chocolate for breakfast."

Steve glared at Billy, a dash of confusion mixed into his expression.
"Are some sort of health nut?"

"You think I got a six pack by eating the way you do?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Steve asked. The edges of the question were softened by the pancake he stuffed into his mouth.

"It's just carbs and grease."

"And dairy."

"Chew with your mouth closed, Jesus." Billy patted his cheek as he chewed. He'd meant for it to be at least slightly intimidating, but it just ended up being almost uncomfortably tender. Steve gave him a bright smile before drinking some orange juice.

It was then that Billy remembered that this was their last breakfast together. By midnight, Steve would be alone in a holding cell. No more before school handfuls of dry cereal straight from the bix and unbuttered toast as they made their way out the door, pushing each other and laughing. No more Saturday mornings where Steve sat cross legged on the floor with a bowl of cereal watching cartoons while Billy drank coffee behind him on the couch.

This time was so much different from the first. Steve was stressed, anxious, but ultimately safe in this moment. Their first breakfast, he was freshly gutted and eating across from someone he expected the same treatment from. And maybe Billy was still fucked up, still just too angry to be completely safe, but he was better than he had been. He wasn't staying out of some God complex or unidentified guilt.

And it was then that Billy realized he loved Steve. Syrup sticky on his lips, dark circles under his eyes, tangled hair, a yellowing bruise growing on his jaw, Steve chewed on completely unaware. Anger, fear, and pure bliss fought for dominance in Billy less than a foot away.

The fear started with Neil, what he'd do if he found out, what he'd do to Steve. From there it grew into the whole town of Hawkins, would they even be able to go to school if anyone found out? It ended at Steve not loving him back. The anger blossomed from that, preemptively hating Steve for any possible breakup, as well as blaming him for the situation as a whole. It wasn't Billy's fault that Steve was so damn beautiful.

He could feel the rage boiling beneath the surface of his skin. What he wanted to do was tear this dirty Reaganite town to the ground, but the only thing there to destroy was Steve. Billy forced himself to look at the cigarette burn on his neck, to remember that look on his face and the cry of pain. He didn't want to be that guy anymore.

As if possessed, his hand reached out to touch the pink burn. There was another one, still in the blistering stage, right beside it. This one looked fresh, maybe a day or two old. Billy's thumb brushed over it lightly, but Steve still flinched.

"Where'd that one come from?" Billy asked.

Steve shrugged, kept eating.

Billy did not dig his thumb in like his instincts told him to. Instead he cupped the back of Steve's head gently. "C'mon, Stevie," he whispered.

"Leave it, alright? It's my last day as a free man, I wanna have a good

time.” Steve got up, carried his plate to the sink.

“Last night you mentioned Hopper potentially giving you an out?”

“It’s just a ploy. He’s just saying that to get me to confess to make his paperwork easier.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Billy, I do.” Steve gave him a pointed look. “Why would Hopper ever do me any favors? He’s hated me since the day I was born.”

“Why?”

“I dunno. He and my dad have beef. Does it matter? What matters is that he just said that, and even if I believed it last night, I know better now.” He squeezed his eyes shut and hit the counter with his fist suddenly. “Fuck, my head hurts.”

Billy got him a glass of water and slid it down the counter towards him. It knocked into Steve’s unmoved hand and toppled over. Steve blinked at the spreading water for a second before turning to glare at Billy.

“You dumbass. Gimme that towel.”

“Hey, I’m helping you!”

“If you keep helping me like this, I’m gonna wind up dead.” His tone was playful as he mopped up the spill. Not that Billy was willing to let himself get mad at that. He promised to himself that he wasn’t going to get mad at Steve, at least until he was behind bars.

“Hey, we should go for a drive,” Steve said. “Get milkshakes and just cruise around and listen to the radio.”

Billy smiled. Steve’s last day and he wanted to spend it driving around aimlessly. It was the most Steve thing in the world. Billy himself would’ve wanted to go out doing something crazy, but all Steve wanted was simple pleasure and some privacy. Well, Billy could do that.

Steve spilled his milkshake in the walk from the restaurant to the car, so Billy made them eat outside. He turned his car on and they climbed on the hood to feel the warmth of the engine.

They don't talk about anything. They talk about everything. Steve chased half-baked conspiracies about living in a stimulation with wondering if ceiling fans every get dizzy. He told Billy about the color patterns in the Mona Lisa as he licked dripping ice cream off his wrist, mentioned that the landscape is different on either side of her. He said he thinks it's a representation of Heaven and Hell, and Billy didn't know shit about it but he believed Steve.

They drove out to the edge of town, an abandoned field Steve lead the way too. He got out of the car almost the minute Billy parked and walked into the rows of flat, dead corn. Billy only managed to catch up to him when he stopped at the edge of a hole in the earth.

"What's this?" he asked.

"I almost died down there. I should've." Steve's jaw twitched. "Do you think I'm being punished because I lived past my expiration date?"

Billy didn't know what to say to that. This was weird, crazy even. Steve was back on his "the government wants me dead" bullshit. Before he could find the right words, Steve had dropped down into the opening.

"Harrington, don't," he called.

"I just want to see if it's all still here," came the response. "Just a minute."

Fuck that. Steve's not gonna deal with more emotionally damaging events around Billy anymore. He dropped into the hole as well.

Steve was staring down an impossibly long tunnel. His whole body trembled slightly and his hand twitched by his side, trying to grab something that wasn't there.

"Stevie?" Billy asked. He stepped closer, put his hand on Steve's shoulder and tried to ignore how he flinched at the touch. "What is

this place?”

“I don’t know. Honestly, I don’t know much of anything.” Steve swallowed hard. “These tunnels used to be packed full of these, these dog things.”

“Demodogs?”

“Yeah.”

Billy couldn’t stand the tightness in Steve’s muscles. It was his last day as a free man, and he was planning to have it remembering a time when he almost died? That was bullshit. No way in Hell was Billy going to let that happen.

He grabbed Steve by the shoulders and turned him so they faced each other. His hand gently pushed a wayward strand of hair behind Steve’s ear. After he got a small nod, he closed the gap between them.

Steve kissed like he was drowning, like Billy was the last of his air tank and he was at the bottom of the ocean. He pulled greedily at Billy’s jacket sleeves, and he kept pushing closer and closer. Billy wrapped his arms around him, held him in tight and safe.

“I can’t go to jail, Billy. Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he said when they pulled away. He was quickly approaching hyperventilation and Billy knew he wouldn’t be able to get a lightheaded Steve back out of here.

“It’s okay, take a deep breath.”

“It’s NOT okay. Jesus, look at me! I’ll get passed around like a blunt. I can’t handle this.”

“Look at me. Steve, please.” Billy waited until those wet brown eyes met his. “Do you want to go?”

“Go where?” Steve asked, cutting himself off with a hiccup.

“I dunno. Anywhere. California. Mexico. I’ll get you out of here, I’ll get you so far away nobody will find you.”

“No, fuck, Jesus. If I go missing, the CIA will, I dunno. I don’t know what they’ll do, but it’ll be bad. I can’t put everyone through that.”

“Fuck everyone else, yeah? Let’s go, let’s disappear.”

“I can’t. They’ll kill my parents if I don’t follow their rules.”

Fuck, Steve really believed that. This was more than just a crazed theory, this was what he truly believed in. Billy couldn’t let him go to jail unprotected. He didn’t think Steve could handle that.

Back in Cali, Billy had known guys who had been in prison. They’d told him all the awful things in there, all the shit that could break even the strongest man. Steve was already falling apart. The idea of Steve in that place brought to mind the idea of a porcelain doll meeting a baseball bat.

That was not going to happen.

“Let’s get outta here. I gotta stop by my place, pick up some cassettes or something.”

13. Chapter 13

Notes for the Chapter:

Short chapter, but I didnt feel like any more would be okay to add, to be honest. thanks for all the support, hope this wasn't a wrong turn for the story lol.

Billy was not going to let Steve go to prison alone. He left the Camero running in his driveway, right behind Neil's car. This was what he had to do.

"Wait here," he said to Steve without looking at him. Before Steve could say anything, he got out of the car and marched inside.

By the front door, Billy stopped and started pulling coats off the rack. He whistled as he worked, loud enough to know it could be heard through the whole house.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Neil asked, stepping into the hallway.

"Don't take it personally." Billy picked up the empty rack in his hand and swing it lightly to test the weight. It wasn't perfect, but it would work.

"William."

"Neil."

His dad was walking towards him, rolling up his sleeves. Billy swallowed and started counting. 2... 3... 4...

He waited until Neil was close enough before swinging the coat rack towards his head. It arched through the air at the perfect angle. A killer blow.

If only Neil hadn't gripped the handle.

He wasn't really that strong, but Billy instinctively stopped. As much as he wanted to push through, he couldn't. Neil had worn him down

too well.

While recovering from the realization that Neil controlled his every muscle, a fist met his face. He stumbled backwards, but didn't fall. Hands fisted in his coat and drove him headfirst into the wall.

Billy retreated into himself. He didn't raise a hand to defend himself. His mind went blank, instead of being living through this moment. It was more like watching some other teenage loser get beat up by his dad on a movie. Poor fucker.

He was so removed from the situation that he barely even realized when the front door swung open. Neil paused, fist in the air, to look at the entryway. Steve took in the sight before him, his chest heaved twice. His eyes met Billy's.

"Steve," Billy said.

"Steve," Neil echoed.

Steve ran.

There was a pause before Neil came to his senses and took off after him. Billy was slower to react than usual, but he still managed to wrap a hand around his dad's ankle before he got away. Neil hit the ground hard, more shocked at seeing the blood from his bloody nose on the white kitchen tile.

He touched lightly at his nose, feeling the crookedness of it. Funny. He'd always thought seeing stars was an expression. Then he noticed a nice, new pair of sneakers planted right in front of him.

His gaze traced up, up, up. Up long legs, up a heaving torso, then landed on something racing towards his face. He was pretty sure it was a baseball bat, with -

He didn't have time to finish the thought before it made contact.

Steve turned his head to the side and threw up on the ground before wiping his eyes. Sweat, tears, blood, whatever. He didn't care enough to figure it out anymore.

“I wanted to....” Billy trailed off. “I didn’t want you in there alone.”

Steve huffed a laugh, mostly because he didn’t know what to say. He offered Billy his hand and pulled him to his feet. Once Billy was standing against a wall, Steve started poking around in the hall closet.

“You’re sweet, but stupid,” he said.

“I know,” Billy responded.

“I love you.”

“I know.”

Steve pulled a king size sheet out of the closet and laid it out beside Neil on the living room floor. “I knew you’d like Star Wars.”

Billy wasn’t sure which of them was more out of it as he watched Steve roll up his dead dad in a flower patterned bed sheet. Both their eyes were equally blank.

“Got a mop?” Steve asked.

“Are you okay?”

“Are you okay?”

Billy didn’t have an answer. Steve settled for wiping down the bloody tile with the kitchen towel before tucking it into the bedsheets.

“What are you doing?” Billy asked.

“I don’t know. It’s not like it matters, right?” Steve took a ragged breath before his internal monologue kicked back in. “Don’t think about it don’t think about it don’t...”

Billy helped him carry the body outside and dump it in the trunk of the camera. It was the middle of a work day, nobody was home but they still worked fast. Getting caught literally red handed was worse than just confessing to Hopper in the Harrington living room.

"Okay." Billy used the blood still pouring steadily from his forehead to smear their handprints and ruin the fingerprints. "Where are we taking it?"

Steve pressed car keys into his hands. "Drive to train station. I'm gonna dump him in that field before coming to pick you up. Can you drive?"

"I'm good." Billy whipped blood out of his eyes again. He felt like he was three steps back from the situation. Watching it happen to someone watching it happen to someone watching it happen. Steve's eyes looked just as empty.

No amount of cold pizza and Dick Van Dyke on vhs was going to make their night any easier. Billy had to focus on not thinking about their coming connected breakdown on the living room floor.

Steve gave him another kiss that tasted of blood and chocolate milkshake.

"You're not porcelein," he said before Steve could get in the Camero.

"Huh?"

"You're not porcelein. You're concrete."

Steve lit a cigarette. "You're crazy."

As he drove to the train station, Billy thought about growing old. He thought about buying a house, a dog, some nice fish. Doing dishes together, sleeping in on sundays, and getting wine drunk on a wednesday night even though they both had work in the morning.

He didn't once think about Steve rotting away in a jail cell until they were both dead and forgotten.